

COLOMBE HOTEL
S. Sixth and Bullitt Avenues
Jeannette
Westmoreland County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5606

HABS
PA
65-JEAN,
53-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 37127
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

COLOMBE HOTEL

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65-JEAN,
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Location: S. Sixth St. and Bullitt Ave.,
Jeannette, Westmoreland County,
Pennsylvania

Date of Construction: Built 1892-3

Present Owner: unknown

Present Use: demolished 1990

Significance: The Colombe was a classic example
of a residence hotel for workers at
the city's many glass factories.
The bar contained an elaborately-
carved back-bar and intricate
mosaic tile floor.

Historian: Gary Koll

Project Information: In February, 1987, the Historic
American Engineering Record (HAER)
and the Historic American Buildings
Survey (HABS) began a multi-year
historical and architectural
documentation project in
southwestern Pennsylvania. Carried
out in conjunction with America's
Industrial Heritage Project (AIHP),
HAER undertook a comprehensive
inventory of Westmoreland County to
identify the region's surviving
historic engineering works and
industrial resources (Edward K.
Muller and Ronald G. Carlisle,
Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania:
An Inventory of Historic
Engineering and Industrial Sites.
Washington, DC: U.S. Department of
the Interior, 1994.) Archives for
HAER/AIHP projects are located at
the Indiana University of
Pennsylvania.

History

Built between 1892-3 in a restrained Second Empire style, the Hotel Colombe served as both a stop for travellers and as a boarding hotel for employees of Jeannette's glass works and other industries. Originally constructed for Louis Eschallier, who gave the hotel its French name, the business was purchased by John Fath in 1894, and operated by the Fath family until 1930. During the Fath's ownership of the hotel, popularly known as the "Columbia," it became an integral part of the surrounding neighborhood.

No information is available on who built the Hotel Colombe, but it may have been a local bricklayer and contractor named Lewis C. Westbrook. A local history published by Jeannette's American Legion for the Bicentennial identifies Westbrook, a founding member of the town council, as the builder of the first brick house in West Jeannette. Westbrook was also the owner of a hotel which was almost identical to the Colombe; the Edna Hotel in Arnold, Pennsylvania, built between 1894-5. Arnold, which is about 30 miles northwest of Jeannette, was built around a window glass factory established by James Chambers after he ended his partnership with H. Sellers McKee. The town also has several double houses which match those built in Jeannette.

During the Fath's tenure the corner room was generally used as an office which residents could use as a lounge. Meals for boarders and the public were served in the main dining room. A small second kitchen served light meals in the cafe next to the bar. Social custom prevented women from being in the main part of the bar as late as the 1960s, so men could join their wives for meals in either the adjacent dining room or cafe. The Fath family apartment and some service rooms were located on the second floor. The third floor was rented to boarders and guests.

Following Prohibition and the hotel's closure in 1930, parts of the building were used by the Salvation Army during the Depression. The hotel and bar were reopened by 1937 under John and Bernard Troglio. John and his wife Jennie eventually purchased the Colombe in 1945, and John passed the family business on to his two sons, Peter and Felix, in 1957. Peter Troglio and his wife Josephine operated the hotel after 1963.

Under the Troglio's the uses of the upper floors remained about the same, though some of the rooms on the third floor were grouped together and the second floor apartments were renovated at various times. The major changes in use were on the ground floor. The former dining room and kitchen were used as a union hall for local 534 of the American Flint Glass Workers Union from

about 1938 until the early 1960s. The corner office was also used as a union hall and as a tenant space for other businesses. Only the Colombe Bar remained virtually unchanged, reopening after Prohibition to serve another generation of glass workers coming off their shifts at the nearby factories.

The last boarder left the hotel in the early 1980s and after that only the bar remained open. Since most of the Colombe's patrons were from McKee Glass, the factory shutdown in 1982 ended much of the bar's business. This, combined with more burdensome licensing laws and liability legislation for drinking establishments, forced the Colombe Hotel to close in 1987. The building was razed in 1990.

Description

With its once prominent location near the McKee Glass Co., the Hotel Colombe was the most distinctive of the many residential hotels on Jeannette's south side with its round corner tower and steep mansard roof punctuated by dormer windows. The tower at the intersection of S. Sixth St. and Bullitt Ave. also marked the junction of two wings in the hotel's L-shaped plan. The ground floor contained a large dining room with adjacent kitchen along Bullitt Ave. and an office at the corner. The Colombe Bar & Cafe fronted onto S. Sixth Street. The second floor was generally used as the owner's family apartments, and the third floor contained eighteen guest rooms and two baths. A one-story laundry extension at the end of the Bullitt Ave. wing, and a small rear kitchen were both added by 1895. A stable was added at the rear corner of the property by 1900.

The Colombe was built of red brick and later plastered with a sanded finish in the 1940s. Decorative corbelling occurred along the cornice and at the base. The storefront sections turned-wood and glass. Three large arched windows and several smaller windows faced onto Bullitt Ave. from the dining room and kitchen, and separate doors from the street led into the dining room and back stairway. The office and main stairway were entered through separate doors from S. Sixth St. At the north end was the entrance to the Colombe Bar & Cafe. The windows at the bar and its adjacent dining area were protected with decorative iron grilles. The upper sections of these windows were bordered with colored glass squares of magenta, yellow and blue.

On the interior the most distinctive feature of the hotel was an ornate wood back bar built in the 1890s. To the front of that was the bar counter itself which ran the depth of the building

and was complete with a spitting trough built into the floor at its base. An elaborate mosaic tile floor was installed in the bar about 1912.

First Floor

The first floor contains the hotel bar and adjacent dining room and kitchen, restrooms, a corner room which served alternately as an hotel office and lease space for outside businesses, and a large rear room along Bullitt Avenue. The kitchen adjacent to the bar and the small addition to the rear were added by 1895.

There are three basic periods for which information is available on the interior of the hotel: 1910-30 under John, and later Maggie, Fath's ownership; 1937-47 when the hotel was operated by John Troglio and his brother Bernard; and under John and his sons' operation of the Colombe after 1947. The information was gathered through interviews with Mrs. Margaret Essway (John Fath's niece), Peter J. Troglio (Bernard Troglio's son), and Peter F. Troglio and Julie Montell (Peter S. and Josephine Troglio's son and daughter) in August 1990.

The Columbe Bar

The bar area remained virtually unchanged until 1940. Prior to that time the bar itself went the full-width of the room, complete with spitting trough in the floor at its base. The kitchen, which was basically an extension of the bar room through an arched opening, served meals in the bar and adjacent dining room. Boarders had their lunches and dinners served here after the hotel was reopened about 1937. An ornate back bar installed in the 1890s has mirrored backs and bevelled glass doors. The mosaic tile floor was installed by John Fath about 1912. There is also a white, ceramic tile wainscot with decorative green bands at the top. This was the last part of the hotel in operation in 1987.

Cafe

Referred to as the cafe under the Faths, and later as the dining or ladies room, this room was always a dining area for the bar. Into the 1920s there was a desk along the wall opposite the entry where overnight guests could register. Since social customs prevented women from being in the main part of the bar as recently as the 1960s, they could only join their husbands for sandwiches and soup in the cafe or main dining room.

Hotel Office

The corner room, unpartitioned until the mid-1970s, was first used as the hotel office for longer-term boarders. A desk stood along the wall to the right of the entry and weekly boarders, who often came out from their homes in Pittsburgh on Sunday evening and returned to them on Friday, could use the room as a lounge during the week. Newspapers and magazines were kept for them to read. Apparently unused during the early 1930s, later uses of the room included a furniture upholstery shop and a small union hall. Peter F. Troglia (Peter S. Troglia's son and John Troglia's grandson), used the corner office for his legal practice beginning in the 1970s.

Dining Room and Kitchen

The large room along Bullitt Ave. was originally subdivided into a hotel dining room and kitchen connected by double swinging doors. The kitchen prepared meals for the boarders and the public before the hotel closed for the first time in 1930. This was apparently the only part of the hotel substantially used during early years of the Depression. The Salvation Army used the hall for their social and religious activities, with some of their members living upstairs, and a mission used the room until 1937. Local 534 of the American Flint Glass Workers Union operated their hall here from about 1938 until the early 1960s, and the cashier's cage for paying dues and fines is still in the room. Two rows of theater-style seats once faced the cage.

Rear Addition

Initially used as a laundry and then as storage and living quarters for unpaying lodgers after the Troglia's took over the hotel, the wall toward the courtyard was demolished in the early 1960s and the room enlarged for use as a garage.

Courtyard and Adjacent Yard

A stable was built before 1900 at the corner of the rear, brick-paved courtyard. It was incorporated into a neighboring business after 1930 and is no longer standing. John Fath was a harness racer and kept his racehorse here and later his car. The courtyard also had kennels for hunting dogs and a chicken coop during the Fath's tenure. Surrounding the courtyard was a stone wall surmounted by a wood fence. The adjacent property was developed as a public swimming pool by Maggie Fath in about 1919 with limited success. The courtyard had a raised wood dance floor when the Troglia's reopened the hotel, but it was torn out in about 1941.

Second Floor

The second floor was generally used as apartments for the Fath and Troglio families. Specific room uses are labelled but some generalizations about the use of both the S. Sixth St. and Bullitt Ave. wings can be made.

The Fath family: John, Maggie, and their seven daughters, used the floor for their family apartment and some service rooms. During their ownership the uses changed very little.

When the hotel was reopened about 1937, John Troglio and his family lived in the rooms along S. Sixth St. and his brother Bernard's family shared the Bullitt Avenue side with tenants. The corner room, then undivided, was used exclusively for making salami until 1947. The Bernard Troglio family moved to the Sixth St. side in 1939 after John and his wife built a house in Jeannette. The Bullitt Avenue wing was made into an apartment and tenant rooms for rent.

Following the War when John Troglio assumed full operation of the hotel, his sons, who split shifts in the bar while their wives shared duties in the kitchen, shared the floor with their families. The Peter S. Troglio family occupied the suite of rooms along Bullitt Ave. while the courtyard side of that wing was occupied by tenants. Felix Troglio and his family lived on the S. Sixth Street side of the second floor. Felix and his family moved out in 1960, followed his brother Peter's family in 1962. Peter Troglio and his family moved back into the Sixth St. wing in 1966, while the other wing was used for storage and by tenants, a long-time bartender, and finally by the Troglio's daughter and son-in-law.

Third Floor

The third floor is the most unchanged of any of the floors of the hotel. Always used exclusively by boarders and guests, the floor has eighteen rooms and two baths. Along the S. Sixth St. side were a row of single rooms, while groups of rooms in the Bullitt Ave. wing were used as apartments at various times after 1937. The last tenant Dominic Ronco, a longtime resident, lived on the third floor until the early 1980s. He was in his nineties when he left the Columbe.

SOURCES

Recorder of Deeds, Westmoreland County Courthouse, Greensburg, Pennsylvania: Hotel Colombe: Deed Book 190/Page 44, 241/479, 248/136, 868/348, 913/123, 1204/543, 1667/146, 1857/560. Edna Hotel: 201/249, 216/3, 313/223.

Personal interviews conducted by Gary Koll: Mrs. Margaret Essway (John and Maggie Fath's niece), 7 & 21 August 1990; Peter F. Troglio and Julie Montell (Peter S. and Josephine Troglio's son and daughter), 28 August 1990; and Peter F. Troglio, Julie Montell, and Peter J. Troglio (Bernard Troglio's son), September 1990.

Sanborn Map Company, New York. Maps of Jeannette, Pennsylvania; 1895, 1900, 1905, 1910, 1916, 1925, 1950.

Tax Assessment Books. Westmoreland County Tax Assessment Office, Westmoreland County Courthouse, Greensburg, Pennsylvania.

ADDENDUM TO
~~HOTEL~~ COLOMBE HOTEL
South Sixth & Bullitt Avenues
Jeanette
Westmoreland County
Pennsylvania

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